

Abstract - NH Instream Flow Program - Policy and Application

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Wayne Ives, Instream Flow Specialist, NH DES

New Hampshire is testing implementation of Instream Flow Rules under a pilot program being applied to two of its Designated Rivers. Rivers are designated for special protection and management under the Rivers Management and Protection Act (RSA 483). The two rivers in the Instream Flow pilot program are the Lamprey and Souhegan Rivers. The pilot program develops protection goals for Instream Flow management plans by identifying the protected entities existing in the Designated River and assessing their flow needs. Flow needs are evaluated within the context of the Natural Flow Paradigm (Poff et al., 1997) and described in terms of magnitude, timing, duration, and frequency of flow. The protected flows are established by the Commissioner of NH DES following presentation of the results at a public hearing. Public participation in the process and results are maintained throughout the pilot program by public hearings and two advisory committees made up of technical specialists and watershed shareholders. All proceedings and reports are posted on the Department's website. The protected flows are maintained by defining a Water Management Plan comprised of water use and conservation plans for each registered water user and impoundment management plans for each dam with greater than 10 acres impounded. One useful planning tool in the rules is an annual assessment of water use compared to stream flow. This assessment identifies locations and levels of water use on the Designated River reaches. Water users can take existing water use into account when planning new or expanded withdrawals. The pilot program strives to protect the public trust and riparian rights under a management plan that allows water use and maintains suitable habitat and recreational conditions.